



Sha'at'nez or The Displacement Annex

Clegg & Guttmann

Introduction

The central idea of the project is to institute in the storefront at Berggasse 19 a temporary annex to the library of the Sigmund-Freud-Museum. The annex will consist of a collection of books about the subject of displacement, in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, and about related topics. The theme of displacement will not be confined to the content of the books but will be alluded to in a variety of ways; it will guide the design of the bookcases, the institutional rules chosen for the annex, the method of book selection etc. The annex is designed as a Space of Displacement. It is a concrete symbol, a place designed to produce a heightened awareness and a repository of intellectual material. As an artwork The Displacement Annex belongs to the category of social sculptures, it is a work of art whose building blocks are institutional arrangements, intellectual constructions and social relations.

The dual nature of the Displacement Annex

The Annex is conceived of as having two different types of viewers. Those who use it as an extension of the Sigmund-Freud-Museum Library will experience it from the inside, so to speak; others, passers by who see it from the street, will experience it externally. For the “internal viewers” the Annex is a **Library**; from the point of view of the passer by it is an **Observation Post**. The relation between the two audiences is, itself, thematized in the project. The passer by who observes those who use the Annex as a library and the reader who

becomes aware of those who look at him from the outside see each other as displaced. In other words, the fact that the two audiences stand to each other in a relation of displacement, makes the moment of self - reflection, when the bifurcated nature of the audience is revealed to its members, also an occasion for a reflection on displacement and on other related topics. As it becomes immersed in the life of the project; the audience of the Annex will experience a moment of self-reflection; as a consequence of his immersion, the audience will become sensitive to the distinction between objects and institutions, between observation and experience, between internal and external perspectives.

The Sha'at'nez bookcase

Sha'at'nez is a Biblical term (Leviticus 19:19) which denotes combinations without organic unity, the result of putting together things which are foreign to one another, (A piece of clothing made partly of cotton and partly of wool, for example, is a sha'at'nez. Such combinations are prohibited by Jewish law.) The elements of a sha'at'nez are all displaced; they are put in a context, which was not meant for them. You may note that sha'at'nez, taken as option which brings together elements which do not belong with each other naturally is, itself, a form of Displacement. The elements are displaced from their original context and put within a new heterogeneous structure.

The bookcase, an assemblage of facsimiles of different libraries, is a sha'at'nez. It contains four parts from four highly significant locations. The first is a reproduction of a part of Freud's original library. The second is a replica of the shelves of Freud Museum in London. The third part is from the Psychiatric Institute of New York City and the last one reproduces the bookshelves of the library of the Sigmund-Freud-Museum, which is located in Freud's original apartment.

In 1938 Freud left his apartment in Vienna and moved to London. His former English residence is now the site of a museum whose library has books from Freud's collection and some, which belonged to his daughter Anna. Indeed, many of Freud's books were brought by him to London. Some of these books were returned to Vienna after the war and they are now in the collection of the library of the Viennese Sigmund-Freud-Museum. The books, which Freud left behind in Vienna, were sold to an antiquarian who, in turn, sold them to the Psychiatric Institute in New York.

Freud was a displaced person and his dispersed books are the silent witnesses of the vicissitude of their owner. The choice of the topic of displacement was motivated, in part, by the wish to commemorate Freud's life.

The selection of the books of the Displacement Annex

As we remarked earlier, the Annex is focused on topics related to displacement. The books therein are divided into three categories:

(i) Books from Freud's collection. We asked each of the institutions mentioned earlier to lend us for the duration of the project three books about displacement, which originally belonged to Freud.¹ The books will be replaced by facsimiles, which will be placed in the locations of the temporarily displaced originals.²

(ii) Facsimiles of the "neighbors" of the books of the first category. We have asked the different institutions to provide us with information about the books, which are located in the neighborhood of those, we chose. (By a neighborhood of a book we mean the five books to the right

¹ The use of books from Freud's original collection is desirable but not absolutely necessary. The choice of other books about displacement, which are in the collection of the above mentioned institutes, will not unduly compromise the conceptual integrity of the project.

and the five books to the left of it.) Those books will be photocopied and placed in the Displacement Annex in the vicinity of the original. In this manner the whole neighborhood will be, in a sense, displaced.)

(iii) Dummy books. The rest of the books in the Annex will be dummy books. The outline (or “skyline”) of these books will correspond to that of the original library. (We will ask for an image of the shelves immediately above and below the books we chose and arrange the dummy books in the same way) In other words, we reproduced the silhouette of the original bookshelves. The shadows of the different libraries have been displaced in yet another sense of the term.

The Displacement Annex as an institutional extension of the Museum

A special card catalog will be prepared for the books of the Displacement Annex. The card catalog will be located in the library of the Sigmund-Freud-Museum. Those who inquire about books located in the Annex will be informed about the location of the Annex and about the opening hours. According to our plan it will be possible to go from the Sigmund-Freud-Museum library to the Displacement Annex once a week. The visitors may stay there, accompanied by a designated person, for the duration of the opening hours of the Annex.

The Annex transforms the location and the conditions of availability of some of the books of the Sigmund-Freud-Museum library; it is a slight intervention in the institutional routine, a temporary transformation of the institutional framework. This limited perturbation is sufficient to produce an effect of institutional defamiliarization, another version of the notion of displacement, in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, which applies to institutions. Defamiliarization makes us look at our environment “with new eyes;” it reverses the numbing

² These books can only be handled by the museum staff.

effect of cognitive inertia and routine. It induces us to observe more attentively and cognize more details. The slight perturbation, which we call The Displacement Annex, creates an occasion for institutional self-reflection.

A remark on the concept of displacement in psychoanalysis

The notion of displacement describes one type of “dream work”, an operation the dreamer performs on the dream-thought in order to transform it into a dream. The purpose of this type of operations is to preserve the “kernel” of the dream-thought while rendering it unrecognizable. Once these operations are performed the dreamer may “have the cake and eat it,” entertain the dream thought but avoid disclosing its content to himself and to others. Freud distinguishes between two operations of this kind, namely, condensation and displacement. He introduced the concepts in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which was published in 1900. That is how he explained the notion of displacement:

These elements, which obtrude themselves in the dream-content as its essential components, do not by any means play this same part in the dream-thought. As a corollary to this, the converse of this sentence is also true. That which is obviously the essential content of the dream thoughts need not be represented at all in the dream. The dream is, as it were, *centered elsewhere*; its content is arranged about elements which do not constitute the central point of the dream-thought.³

The operation of displacement, then, transforms the central point of the dream thought and put it somewhere “in the periphery” and, vice versa, a

³ See *The Interpretation of Dreams* p. 190. The quote is taken from the English translation of Brill. Wordsworth Classics, Hertfordshire, 1997.

point from the periphery of the dream-thought is selected and placed into the center of the dream-content. In extreme cases the center of the dream-thought does not appear in the dream at all. When this happens a partial portion of the dream-thought represents the whole. This kind of representation follows the logic of metonymy; the whole is represented by its parts.

This characterization of displacement guided us throughout the preparation of the project. At any given point we tried to look at the situation from a new point of view which highlighted an aspect which was hitherto poorly noticed or altogether unnoticed; from such points of view what-is-always-noticed is invariably relegated to the periphery of the vision. The purpose of the exercise was the simulation of an aspect of the dreamwork and its embodiment in concrete objects. The concretization may produce in the viewer a heightened awareness of the characteristics of the dreamwork, of the violence done to the dream-thought when it is presented in the form of a dream.

As we remarked earlier, another by-product of the transformation of the dream-thought was that it produces an effect of defamiliarization; the choice of a new point of view, which privileges the periphery and de-emphasizes the center, creates a new fresher vista on what is too-familiar-to-notice. It is our hope then, that when we present a sha'at'nez library, fit for a dream, and create for it an institutional form, which we then transplant in the ordinary institutional body, we do not only explain something about the nature of dreamwork. We hope to create a new construct, a social skyline of an unfamiliar sort, which stimulates the social imagination as much as it explicates the subterranean operations of the human mind.